

reduced. Indeed *usambarae* shows a close approach to *gabala* below, having also an olive breast-band and flanks, but having a dull orange wash on the throat and breast which overlies the olive, making the contrast between the throat and breast less marked than in *gabala*.

In colour the upper parts of *gabala* are close to *cyornithopsis*: the head and mantle are slightly more rufous, less olive, but have the same minute dark edges to the feathers which give a faintly scalloped appearance: the tail is less rufous, closer to that of *usambarae*.

Thus while *gabala* shows significant differences in both structure and colour from *Muscicapa*, it shows none from *Sheppardia*, and I recommend that it should be transferred to that genus. It should be considered as a species, *Sheppardia gabala* (Rand), with affinities to both *S. sharpei* and *S. cyornithopsis*.

The specimens have been examined with me by Derek Goodwin, R. E. Moreau and R. W. Sims, who agree with these conclusions.

TABLE OF MEASUREMENTS

	wing		bill		tail		tarsus	
	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀
<i>cyornithopsis</i> 10♂ 9♀	72-77	67-71	15-16	14.5-16	51-56	45-48	23-26	22-24
<i>usambarae</i> 5♂ 3♀	67-74	65	14-15	14-15	52-55	46-48	22-23	20-21
<i>gabala</i> 3♂ 2♀ (from Rand)	66-67	61-62	14-15	14	50-54	46-48	21	20-21

## Note on the relations of the species of Wagtails

by J. M. WINTERBOTTOM

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This note is prompted mainly by Irwin's interesting paper (1960). The genus *Motacilla* dates back to the Oligocene and present-day species fall into several groups. In the first, the tail is about the same length as the wing and the plumage is predominantly black and white. The number of species in this group is open to dispute, but Vaurie (1959) puts the Palaearctic forms into three species, *alba*, *grandis* and *madaraspatensis*, and considers the Ethiopian *aguimp* as conspecific with the first of these. Voous (1959) is more doubtful about this last and I would personally keep them separate. Be that as it may, it is relevant to notice that the Palaearctic forms of *alba* number eleven, whereas the Ethiopian forms number only two and *madaraspatensis*, which is really a tropical species, only just entering the Palaearctic, has no subspecies.

The second group is characterised, in most forms, by having the tail decidedly longer than the wing and by its preference for clear, running, rocky streams. There are two species, the Palaearctic *cinerea* and Ethiopian *clara*, sometimes united. The Palaearctic form is further distinguished by its yellow underparts; and it may be noted that in one Palaearctic subspecies, *M. c. robusta*, the tail is shorter than the wing. There are five subspecies of the Palaearctic *cinerea* and only three of *clara*.

The third group is characterised by having the tail decidedly shorter than the wing and a strong development of yellow. It consists of two

Palearctic species, *citreola* and *flava*. The first of these comprises three subspecies and the second is so notoriously variable that no two systematists agree on the number of subspecies admissible and there is considerable disagreement on whether these constitute one species or more than one, and, if so, how many.

The remaining species is the Ethiopian *capensis*. Irwin (1960) has given reasons for regarding it as closely related to *flava*, being, in his opinion, an isolated representative of a form of wide Palearctic distribution and derived from that form. There are certainly resemblances between the two species but these are not, in my opinion, proof of so close a relationship as Irwin infers. *M. capensis* agrees with the *alba* group in having a tail of medium length; it has some slight infusion of yellow in its plumage; and it is divisible into three valid subspecies.

From the foregoing, I would suggest that the genus as a whole has evolved largely in the Palearctic; that *aguimp* and *clara* are indeed isolated representatives derived from the Palearctic *alba* and *cinerea* stock respectively; but that *capensis* must be very close to the original form from which the Palearctic wagtails have diverged, the *alba* group by suppression of yellow and intensification of black; the *flava* group by shortening the tail and increasing the amount of yellow pigment; and the *cinerea* group by lengthening the tail, and increasing the yellow pigment in some cases; and that the variation shown in this last group in respect of both these characters (*M. cinerea robusta* in tail-length and *M. clara* in pigmentation) suggest that these changes have all been fairly recent.

References:—

- Irwin, M.P.S. (1960), 'Aspects of Relationship between Palearctic and Ethiopian Wagtails', *Bull. B.O.C.*, 80: 61-4.  
 Vaurie, C. (1959), 'The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna', i. London.  
 Voous, K. H. (1959), 'The Relationships of the European and Ethiopian Avifaunas', *Proc. P.A.O.C.*, *The Ostrich*, Suppl. 3: 34-9.

## A variant plumage of the

### Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla flava thunbergi* Billberg

by C. J. O. HARRISON

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On the 4th August 1960 while studying birds along the Torne River in Northern Sweden, near Haparanda, I observed a variant individual among the local Grey-headed Wagtails *Motacilla flava thunbergi* Billberg. These wagtails were present in scattered family parties along the meadows beside the river. The typical juveniles appeared dark brown on head, mantle, back, and wing-covert, with pale buff on the underside and yellow on the under tail-coverts. The eye-stripe and throat appeared almost white, and the dark stripe on either side of the throat, joining across the breast, almost black.

The variant individual had plumage in which the brown colour was replaced by a clear grey, darker than that of the juvenile White Wagtails *Motacilla alba alba* L. which were also present in that locality. The underside, throat and eye-stripe appeared white, but the under tail-coverts retained their yellow colour.